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THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY

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Last week I analyzed in part a paper by Matthew Arnold, entitled *On the Modern Element in Literature*. In this issue I continue the analysis, with some comments.

To Arnold, the age of Pericles is a highly-developed, a modern, a deeply interesting epoch. This epoch, he continues, is adequately interpreted by its highest literature, especially by the poetry of Pindar, Aeschylus, and, above all, of Sophocles. Aristophanes, too, is an adequate representative of the age.

Arnold passes on to note that though, as we know, Menander was most highly esteemed, Menander has perished, Aristophanes has survived. Why? Because between Aristophanes and Menander, as the result of the Peloponnesian War and other causes, the noblest channels of Athenian life, those of political activity, had begun to dry up.

From that date the intellectual and spiritual life of Greece was left without an adequate material basis of political and practical life; and both inevitably began to decay. The opportunity of the ancient world was then lost, never to return; for neither the Macedonian nor the Roman world, which possessed an adequate material basis, possessed, like the Athens of earlier times, an adequate intellect and soul to inform and inspire them; and there was left of the ancient world, when Christianity arrived, of Greece only a head without a body, and of Rome only a body without a soul.

The last sentence of this quotation strikes me as a good example of that passion for phrase-making which is the bane of so much criticism, a passion for phrase-making which leaves the reader often so cold and makes him so distrustful of the critic and essayist. On Arnold's own showing there was not, at the time Christianity came, of Greece even so much as a head; it had lost its head some time before. Furthermore, there seems to me a *petitio principii* running through Arnold's paper. The term 'modern' is a sadly abused word. One hears ad nauseam of Petrarch as 'the first modern man'. But if he essays to discover what is meant by a modern man, he can get no satisfactory answer, because every answer is more or less subjective and personal. Mr. Arnold follows in the paper under review a very simple and satisfactory process; in a purely subjective way he posits certain characteristics as marking modern as distinct from ancient times and then proceeds to find those characteristics in the Greeks of a given epoch. Nothing could be easier for the critic with phrases, consciously or unconsciously, as the goal of his writing, but a hard-

headed, logical reader is likely to take exception both to the method and to its results.

When Arnold said that there was "of Rome only a body without a soul", he was writing in the spirit of German disparagement of Latin literature, a spirit imported into certain literary circles in England by Coleridge and Carlyle (see Sellar, *Virgil*, 69, 71-72; *The Classical Journal* 3.251 ff.). That spirit affected English scholarship so deeply, in spite of its outward adherence to classical tradition, that even Conington, Vergil's greatest expositor in England, spoke of the *Aeneid* in apologetic terms.

But let us return to Arnold. The great period of Rome, he says, is perhaps the greatest, the fullest, the most significant period on record, but Latin literature does not adequately interpret that period.

Lucretius, argues Arnold, is modern, as modern in his *feeling* as Thucydides was modern in his *thought*. Lucretius is modern in the feeling of depression, of *ennui* which marks his poem, especially in the latter part of the third book. But his poem is not adequate: "how can a man adequately interpret his age when he is not in sympathy with it?" From the multiplied activities of life, continues Arnold, Lucretius withdrew himself and bade his disciples withdraw from them; he is overstrained, gloom-weighted, morbid; and he who is morbid is no adequate interpreter of his age. This criticism of Lucretius I leave to some professed Lucretian to answer in detail. I shall only remark here that a writer who is gloomy, morbid, and depressed may well be an adequate interpreter, if not of his age as a whole, yet of a large part of his age. Whatever Cicero might say against the Epicureans as *minuti philosophi*, the Epicurean tenets did make their marked appeal to the Romans; in this respect Lucretius must have been an adequate representative of his age. If he was not, who could have been? why did the Romans preserve his poem? If Arnold's argument that the loss of Menander and the preservation of Aristophanes prove that the one was inadequate, the other adequate is valid, then by parity of reasoning we are bound to infer that Lucretius's poem survived because it was an adequate expression of something in Roman experience. Is not Arnold forgetting, also, that literature lives because, in addition to all else, it represents the universal and the eternal, not the temporary or the local, however splendid these may be. In what Lucretius says in Book III of the futility of pleasure,

he certainly adequately portrayed the experiences of many Romans, even of Epicureans, who living on lower levels than those occupied by Lucretius and his master sought to apply the doctrine that pleasure is the only good, the attainment of pleasure virtue.

Vergil, says Arnold, is not an adequate interpreter of his age. The epic form suffices for the representation of contemporary or nearly contemporary events; but to picture adequately the past the drama rather than the epic is needed. Arnold cites with approval the view of Niebuhr (well-nigh the last German to whom I should think of going for criticism of Vergil) that "Vergil . . . expressed no affected self-disparagement, but the haunting, the irresistible self-dissatisfaction of his heart, when he desired on his death-bed that his poem might be destroyed". To this consciousness of the inadequacy of the Aeneid Arnold traces that melancholy which every one sees in the poem! I prefer to apply, to critics other than Arnold for views of the Aeneid; Leo, in his paper on *Die Originalität der lateinischen Literatur*, is a far safer guide.

Horace, says Arnold, is likewise inadequate; he lacks seriousness, as Lucretius and Vergil lack cheerfulness. Here Arnold is at the opposite pole from Mr. Verrall who, years ago, starting with the fact that in *Carmina* 3.30 and 4.3 Horace definitely connects his name and fame with the name of Melpomene, the Muse of tragedy, insisted that Horace wished his own world to regard him as a poet of melancholy. It is only by slow degrees that we come to see things, even simple things, in their right relations. Scholars long were troubled because Horace called himself the first lyric bard of Rome, and they sought diligently to explain why he overlooked Catullus (he knew Catullus well enough to borrow from him). Yet the answer was close at hand: Catullus was to the Romans, as Martial clearly shows, not a lyric poet in the stricter sense, but an epigrammatist, a point of which Mr. H. V. Canter has been at some pains to remind us in *The Classical Journal* 6.196-208. It is easy to make a selection of Horace's Odes which shall represent him as lacking in seriousness, as the poet only of wine, woman, and song; it is easy to overlook those Odes in which he considers, with seriousness enough in all conscience, the aims political, religious, moral which a good government should set before itself. It is easy also to take too seriously such expressions as that which concludes *Carmina* 1.6, to misinterpret the smile that ever plays about Horace's face, forgetting what he said of smiles in *Sermones* 1.1.23 ff. When I think e. g. of *Carmina* 1.12 as containing a muster rôle of the heroes of Rome, and connect it in my thoughts with what Suetonius tells us (*Aug.* 31) of the statues of the heroes of Rome which Augustus set up in his Forum, I see in Horace no lack of seri-

ousness, no lack of ability to represent adequately the deeper aspirations of his countrymen. It is easy to say of Horace that he took no part in the life of his day: but is this statement true? Was he not taking part in it, in yeoman fashion, by his poems relating to national affairs? Did not the shrewd Maecenas and the shrewder Augustus see rightly when they saw in Horace a valuable ally in the practical business of Roman life?

But space is running out. I must, however, say a word about Vergil. What was Vergil really trying to do in the Aeneid? Was he trying to give a picture of a past age? or was he trying to embody certain ideas, intangible, but none the less real, which had inspired his countrymen in the past and were their encouragement in the present and their hope for the future? If this was his aim, did he accomplish it adequately? who shall answer such a question? Arnold? or the Romans who gave to the Aeneid at once such an overwhelmingly enthusiastic reception?

Though I have ventured to dissent from the conclusions of a large portion of Arnold's paper, I commend its study. There is far more to be learned, often, from papers with which we disagree than from those which command our entire approval. In the case of the latter what Pliny says about long speeches too often applies (*Epp.* 1.20.13): *Praeterea suae quisque inventioni favet et quasi fortissimum complectitur cum ab alio dictum est quod ipse praevit.*

C. K.

GRAECIA CAPTA¹

For the purpose for which the Classics have their inalienable value, ancient literature is one and indivisible. Because of the large truth we can pardon the untruth in Shelley's enthusiastic utterance: "We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have all their root in Greece". We are all Latins in our sense of social solidarity inwrought with our allegiance to the majesty of the State.

There is only one original literature, apart from the Hebraic, that has had any appreciable influence upon us. Schopenhauer's dream of the enlightening power of the Upanishads remains a dream. Within its large range Greek literature was universal in its sympathies and in its authority. It is preëminently the literature of classical antiquity, a world-literature transmitted to the world-literature of modern times by the Romans. By that mediating influence Latin literature came itself to form a part of the ancient world-literature.

Rome alone made a stand against the complete Hellenization of the culture of the ancient world. For two centuries, indeed, it was a question whether she was to create a literature of her own or to suc-

¹ An address delivered at a meeting of The New York Latin Club, November 10, 1910. Here and there the author is indebted to Professor Leo's sketch of Latin Literature. (The paper is reprinted, by permission from *The Educational Review*, February, 1911).